DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 309 562 EA 021 190

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TITLE Preparing for the Future: Facing Change and Conflict.
PUB DATE Jun 89
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on Educational Leadership (Cologne, Germany, June 1989).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Conflict Resolution; *Curriculum Development; Decision Making; *Educational Change; Educational Technology; Elementary Secondary Education; Faculty Development; *Instructional Improvement

ABSTRACT

It is the theme of this paper that educators must effect the restructuring and reforms necessary to adapt their school systems to current technological and social conditions. The report states that educators must examine the current structure of the schools with a view toward streamlining and moving the decision-making process closer to where the action takes place: the local school and the classroom. The study recommends that changes in the nation's school system to face the future should include implementing early intervention programs, allowing access to pre-elementary school programs for all children regardless of their socioeconomic background; periodic systematic reviews of school curriculum and relevant updates; and the utilization of modern educational technologies. The study suggests that while change and conflict are inevitable, adaptability and change are essential for the survival of today's successful school organization. (KM)

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PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE: FACING CHANGE AND CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE: FACING CHANGE AND CONFLICT

The future is demanding that school systems prepare their students for a world as yet unknown. The Age of Technology is upon us; changes are occurring faster than most individuals are capable of comprehending.

It is incumbent on educators to effect the restructuring and reforms necessary to change the systems to reflect that which is needed at this time. Change is inevitable as is the accompanying conflict that occurs.

This paper deals with the changes needed to face the future and strategies for managing change and conflict.

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PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE: FACING CHANGE AND CONFLICT:

> Strong leaders create strong schools. Research and common sense suggest that administrators can do a great deal to advance school reform. I believe that they must and will lead the second wave of reform.
>
> Bill Clinton, Governor of Arkansas Chairman, Task Force on Leadership and Management, Time For Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education, U.S.A.

The first wave of educational reform occurred in the United States, following the release of A Nation at Risk by the United States Department of Education and reports by national organizations in 1983. The emphasis was on setting standards and expectations for schools. State after state responded by raising/revising graduation requirements, and instituting testing procedures for promotion, high school graduation, teacher certification and the like. Salaries were recognized as being low and unattractive to quality graduates, as was the need to add dollars to support and upgrade instructional programs. There were large increases for education in state budgets; gains were made.

These gains notwithstanding, a "second wave of reform" is on the horizon. The Next wave, A Synopsis of Recent Education Reform Reports, published by the Education Commission of the States in January 1987, summarized the common points in the "recent education reform reports":

All or most of the recent reports agree that:

1. Progress has been made in improving education, but a second round of reforms is needed to prepare students better for a changing society and to address omissions in initial reform efforts.
2. Teaching should become a profession, or at least more like a profession.
3. Education policy must enable learning to occur by improving the conditions for learning and teaching.
4. There is cause for optimism that education can be improved because educators know what needs to be done.
5. Other things -- attitudes, climate, relationships, community support -- are as important as money.
6. Real reform is local, because the act of learning is ultimately an individual act.
7. More collaboration is needed,both within the education establishment and beyond to include parents, legislators, governors and the community as a whole.
8. Education must take new steps to address the unique needs of minorities.

Attention needs to be turned to the processes

> of schooling and to the conditions that need to be met for changes to be fully implemented in schools and in the lives of students.
>
> School leadership will be the key ingredient of this second wave of reform. So will restructuring schools to meet the new demands of teaching a more diverse student population.

Time for Results, The Governors' 1991 Report on Education, U.S.A.

The Report further recognizes that students are, and will be growing up in a far different world from the one in which the general public grew up:

- 30% of all students are now latch-key children, with many spending three to four hours alone after school
- 25% of the students under the age of 18 have been identified as living in poverty
- 50% of them will end up living in a single parent home before their school days are over
- 25% of the students will be from a minority group

The outlook for the teaching force is not very bright. The Report states:

> If the current trends continue, fewer minorities will enter teaching, and future teachers will continue to come from the bottom half of their college class. During the next ten years, almost 70% of the current teaching force is expected to retire -- at the very time the demand for teachers will increase by 100,000.

As the world moves into the Information Age -- the Age of Technology, it is recognized that there is a need for highly skilled workers. The traditional unskilled jobs are being replaced by technology and skilled workers are needed to "man" the technology.

In order to make certain that schools do, in fact, graduate skilled workers capable of assuming their roles in society, schools need to be more effective in meeting the individual needs of students. Administrators, teachers, parents, administrators and school board members need to work closely to restructure the delivery system and share the decision-making to the maximum extent possible.

The research is replete with practices that work in schools that foster excellence. Administrators and teachers need to draw from the research and adapt the information to meet the needs of the individual schools.

The first graduating class of the 21st Century is in school at this time. The future is at our doorstep -- action must be taken now to prepare the students to participate fully in a world that will be far different from what it is today.

The preparation for the future lies primarily in the hands of administrators and teachers who have the responsibility for teaching the children. Just as a skyscraper needs a firm, rock-solid foundation, so too do students. They must have, as a foundation, an elementary school experience that is rock-solid, with no gaps. Much of the learning at the elementary school level is hierarchical; gaps should not occur.

Professional staff have the responsibility to assure that the essential skills taught at the elementary level become tools that the students can use again and again as they unlock new technologies, integrate new research findings, search for solutions to problems, make decisions and communicate across great distances. The tool skills must become part and parcel of every student's experiential background. No student will be able to function without them.

David T. Kearns, chairman and chief executive officer of the Xerox Corporation (1988) states:

> The U.S. Department of Labor has a new study of the makeup of the American workforce by the year 2000. Assistant Secretary of Labor Roger Semerad says that there will be a job in the future for every qualified person who wants one. The real question, he warns, is whether we're going to have enough qualified persons to fill those jobs. The answer is no -- not the way things look now.
>
> The basic skills of our workforce -- particularly at the entry level -- are simply not good enough for the United States in a world economy. By 1990 three out of four jobs will require some education or technical training after high school.

Decisions need to be made at the school level now. There is a need to carefully examine the current structure of the schools with a view towards streamlining and moving the decision-making closer to where the action takes place -- the local school and the classroom. "Teachers and principals are partners in the school improvement process. Their mutual responsibilities and common obligation demand a concerted effort to forward the quest for educational excellence." (Ventures in Good Schooling, 1986)

Decisions affecting the operation of the local school and educational strategies and methods, such as class size, pupil/teacher ratios, groupings, selection of textbooks and materials, use of time and space, and assignment of non-teaching responsibilities are all decisions that should be made at the local school. Decisions need to be made in terms of teachers/teaching and learners/learning. Teachers know best what individual students need when they prepare to teach them. When building staff -- principal and teachers -- assess

their school needs/students'needs; identify goals and objectives, work plans, a time line; assign responsibilities among the staff; identify an evaluation scheme; and write a school improvement plan incorporating these elements, they are indeed accountable for what happens to children in the building. When staff have the ability to take part in, and ownership of, what is happening to them and their students, morale is high and students do much better. School-based management and shared decision-making recognize that administrators and teachers involved in making the decisions are also held accountable for the results.

Schools need to identify a comprehensive school improvement plan based on a needs assessment and careful analysis of available data; they will then be truly accountable for student learning and growth to their communities.

Schools not achieving their objectives need to be prepared to respond and give the reasons for not doing so -- if not, why not?

Instructional leaders need to make certain that careful monitoring of the instructional program is ongoing and that early-intervention strategies and promising practices are used as needed.

Early intervention strategies have proven effective and need to be recognized as valid options and incorporated into the elementary school at all levels. No longer can a student be allowed to fall father and farther behind; efforts must be mounted to reinforce the student's weak areas just as soon as signs of weakness are evidenced. Careful monitoring of the student's work relative to the instructional objectives, attitude, work habits, etc. needs to be done on a continuing basis. Lapses should not occur, reinforcement should take place just as soon as possible. The longer the wait, the "behinder" the student gets.

Perhaps a staff could consider operating in a non-graded organizational structure. A team teaching arrangement could make certain that the needs of the child are taken care of through the team. Recognizing the need for continuous progress could eliminate the need for some children, who may not be achieving "on grade level", to learn on a continuum and not have the stigma of failing a grade and having to repeat that which they have already mastered.

Early childhood programs need to be studied and, as feasible, efforts made to incorporate these experiences into the public schools.

Preschool, extended-day kindergartens, and full-day kindergartens contribute to a student's success as the child progresses through the grades. The advantages and disadvantages of these programs need to be carefully examined along with the requirements for space, staff, materials, impact on all facets of the system etc. Those making decisions need to recognize that while many children in the middle and upper socio-economic levels have the advantage of attending preschools, extended-day and full-day kindergartens, the disadvantaged 3- and 4- year olds generally do not. Efforts need to be expended in order to assure that <u>all</u> children have equal access to programs. Administrators and teachers can best articulate the benefits of such programs in their own schools.

Curriculum renewal efforts need to be undertaken in order to assure relevance of courses/course content.

Staff need to participate in a systematic review of the curriculum. It is no longer acceptable to allow a curriculum to remain intact for years without giving it careful scrutiny to assure that it is still relevant. School systems need to identify a four or five year cycle during which time all curriculum areas will be reviewed, to include the objectives for the various grade levels, the textbooks and supplementary materials being used, equipment needed, evaluation methods, etc. Interdisciplinary approaches need to be suggested in order to accommodate the mandates given to the schools. The use of technology may well assist the staff in achieving their objectives.

The uses of the latest technolgy should be reviewed, planned for and acquired to assist in the teaching/learning process.

Educational technology needs to be integrated into the curriculum and provide access to learning opportunities. Data bases, self-paced instruction, simulated labs, and computer-assisted instruction are useful and available. "For teachers, the microcomputer-based laboratory devices far surpass even the most carefully worded definitions and explanations in their power to deepen students' understanding." (Wilson, 1986)

The identified curriculum objectives, by instructional area, and student progress, by instructional area, should be stored in computers and accessed for each student, as needed, together with a list of resource materials to support the next objective that is to be taught. Key decisions affecting each student can be assisted by the information that could be readily available to teachers and the administration. Students need to be grouped for instructional purposes -- they need to be taught one at a time, together. Individual educational plans and progress towards achieving them, should be put onto a computer.

Distance teaching/learning facilitates home instruction and enables programs to be delivered to students at various locations that the school may not be able to offer on a routine basis. When a system/school has a very limited number of students needing a particular course, it is possible to pool resources by using state-of-the-art interactive technology to deliver courses to students who are geographically distant from each other.

Video projectors make it possible to use a computer for whole-class instruction. Video discs store tremendous quantities of material on each disc. For example, an entire encyclopedia can fit on just one disc. Video discs are virtually indestructible.

Desktop publishing is here to stay. Students can do remarkable work with the programs and feel very good for having produced the publication.

The administration of the school can be greatly enhanced by the use of technology in such areas as word processing, record storage/retrieval, electronic mail systems, fax machines, copy machines, shared data bases, and bulletin boards.

Technology facilitates communication between the school and home/community. It needs to be acquired, people trained in its use, and used.

Parental support needs to be solicited; parents need to be kept informed.

Parents want to be involved in their children's learning. Many are prohibited for a variety of reasons, such as, but not limited to, work hours that don't readily lend themselves to visit the school during school hours for teacher conferences, student productions, science fairs, etc.; heavy family commitments that preclude the parent coming in to school; not knowing how to participate in a parent-teacher conference. Alternative strategies need to be identified to accommodate the parents and involve them in the school.

Emphasis needs to be placed on positive school community relations; open lines of communication must be maintained.

Parents and the community need to be kept informed as the school staff sets high expectations for the school and the children. Share what the students and staff do with the school community; tell the story because it may not be told if left to the media. Use the many channels of communication to celebrate the good!

Schools need to have two-way communication with the publics they serve: information needs to be shared so that the public knows what is happening, what the school is trying to accomplish, and what it does accomplish. The public needs to know that it can approach the school and the administrator; that dialogue can be initiated by either party.

Staff development programs need to be developed with considerable staff input.

As staff move out to make the changes that need to be put into place, staff development efforts need to be directed towards those areas that the staff feels they would like to explore, or need additional support. Consideration needs to be given to lengthening the school year so that the time needed for staff development will not come on a "pull-out basis" during the course of the school year that deprives the students of the services of their teachers, but rather at a time when the teachers can devote a block of time to the designated inservice.

With many changes such as those discussed above taking place in the school building, the administrator's role becomes more important than ever. The ability to make change(s) rests largely on the leadership abilities and initiative of the administrator.

Recognizing the pressures that the current wave of reform is exerting, change in educational settings is inevitable and may well affect the goals, personnel, use of technology and structure of the school system. This change of the status quo may be planned or unplanned, anticipated or unanticipated, evolutionary or revolutionary, desirable or undesirable and brought about by external forces or internal forces. In an ideal situation, change is planned, anticipated, evolutionary, desirable and initiated by forces from within the system, recognizing full well the need for change. However, recent issues of national interest have indicated that this scenario is not always the case; that all too often change is unanticipated and brought about by external forces.

In implementing change and reform, there are some basic assumptions to be considered: change is inevitable, it is essential to organizational survival, change may take any one of a variety of forms, and adaptability and change are inherent in today's succesful organizations.

In helping staff, there is a need to recognize that individuals have personal needs that must be satisfied and values that dictate how that individual feels about a particular situation. These needs and values are reflected in the person's attitude and the manner in which the person responds to an experience/change. An individual's cultural, ethnic, racial and socio-economic background affects one's perspective. This perspective is "the point(s) of view different people take toward their experiences; the direction of a person's focus; feelings, attitudes, values and needs generated by training, education, and experience." (American Management Association, 1986) Individuals who have had positive experiences are willing to attempt something new, to try a different direction, and are willing to take some action and risk to effect change. Involving people prior to instituting the proposed change brings confidence and a feeling that their interests are being considered. Being able to be a part of the planning for change gives people the feeling that their ideas are at least being listened to. Being a part of something helps to build ownership of the acceptance of the idea. Helping to support those who are having difficulty accepting the idea of change, even if it is only listening to their ideas and offering emotional support builds trust and confidence. Negotiating with people and reaching an agreement as to why a change is taking place, what is going to happen, and what is expected of them, gives them the feeling that there is a clear and honest reason for change.

Individuals sharing common goals, objectives, values, and attitudes often come together and form groups. Groups have strength based on their numbers and tend to reflect on a "problem" from a vantage point that is favorable to their "cause". There is a need to recognize that, in effecting change, although there is generally one set of facts for a given issue, the various vantage points of the group(s) must be recognized and dealt with. Failure to attempt to meet the needs of the group leads to a loss of good will and can create negative reactions.

Inherent in the change process are forces for and against change. The driving forces are viewed as those which tend to initiate, promote, and sustain change, while the restraining forces are those which tend to resist or decrease the momentum of the driving forces. When these forces are equal, there exists a state of equilibrium towards which all schools/systems strive. The process of change involves recognizing the need to either increase the driving forces or reduce the restraining forces in order to reach the point of equilibrium - a point that is never permanently fixed.

Driving forces within the organization can include organization norms which emphasize innovation, new or altered goals: the development of new technological capacity, new structural forms, and a change in leadership role/style. Many of these forces represent change in themselves, which might have occurred because of "internal" and/or "external" forces. Changes in one part of an organizational structure tend to induce further changes in various other parts of the organization.

Resistance to change is inherent in most people and stems from several sources. These include fear of the unknown; an allegiance to the past; fear of losing something important such as status, power, and control; conflicting perceptions and values; a low tolerance for change; a lack of interest; and a desire to maintain the status quo.

There are various types of resistance to change. Some individuals oppose any kind of change, while others react negatively to a specific change. Others reject change because of poor relationships with those supporting the change. Resistance to change begins when the nature of the change is not made clear and individuals don't know what is expected of them. This resistance increases with administrative pressure and decreases with input and shared decision making.

Change proceeds in three distinct stages: the initiation stage, the implementation stage, and the incorporation stage. It must be noted, however, that successful completion of one stage does not guarantee successful completion of the next since these stages are influenced by the attributes of the innovations that are introduced; the manner and timing of their introduction; the characteristics of the school personnel who must make the changes and the physical attributes of the organizational setting.

The steps in the change process include:

- Identifying the need for change
- Establishing a climate for change
- Clarifying specific areas in need of change
- Establishing goals and intended activities
- Examining alternatives
- Initiating the change in a field test
- Evaluating and amending the field test stage
- Generalizing and stabilizing the change
- Developing strategies for monitoring adherence to the changes
- Designing a long-range change evaluation procedure which includes consideration of feedback from all levels.

The process of change will take on a different perspective depending on whether the change is viewed as "changing from" or "changing towards". "Changing from" represents traditional change and denotes dissatisfaction with the present situation. Viewed from this perspective, change tends to be a negative, reactive and piecemeal process. People react, adapt, adjust and cope in relation to what is taking place. "Changing towards" represents constructive change and is viewed as a creative and proactive process. Change represents a gain and is not as threatening to those involved, for no one resists a clear gain. The change process then becomes positive, coordinated and directed toward desired results.

When effecting change, it may be necessary to remove and/or transfer members from certain positions who resist the changes and replace them with others from within and outside who behave and think in ways supportive of the proposed change. This can be accomplished in a number of ways: by removing support for old attitudes; saturating the environment with the new values to be

acquired; by minimizing threats against change; and by reinforcing change as it proceeds in the desired direction. It may also be necessary to alter the behavior and attitudes of the original members of the organization who have been retained in order to insure the success of the proposed changes.

Ideally, the administrator should become an agent of active change who not only responds to external change, but recognizes and plans for change internally; addresses forces for and against change; and develops strategies for coping with change. As a change agent, the administrator can provide services in a variety of ways: as a catalyst who activates the change process; as an initiator who suggests new ideas and new programs; as a facilitator who provides support and encouragement during the various stages of change, providing "how to" advice and appropriately timed solutions when needed; and as a resource liaison who helps identify and use resources both within and outside the system as the change occurs.

In managing change, the administrator must join with and influence others. Situational factors must be identified such as the type of resistance that exists; the commitment level of those involved in the change; and the time and stakes involved in the process. The change agent must be sure to give explanations; to allow for the airing of feelings, views and ideas; to encourage participation in the decision-making especially by those most affected by the impending change so that input is considered and accepted as valuable; to provide reassurance and support as the change progresses; and to implement and monitor the change, remembering to carefully consider the feedback from all levels. Persuasion and power will enter into the process but to be effective and to function enduringly, change should come about as a deliberate collaborative effort of all those involved. Recent studies have shown that teachers are less likely to resist change if it is handled properly. It is necessary to understand how systems and staff members change and to recognize that change is gradual and developmental, beginning where people are at present and progressing, in steps, over a period of time. For a change to be successful, there must be various opportunities and support for change that build on the current strengths of staff and also encourage further growth and development.

Conflicts often arise in the implementation of change and inhibit the quest for educational excellence. Early symptoms of conflict include "tensions, no desire to communicate, work not done, disastrous meetings, quick and easy anger, slipping morale, absenteeism, accidents, slamming doors, shouting, bad times", etc. (American Management Association, 1986).

What are some sources of conflict in a school?

Poor communication is a prime source of conflict. Messages tend to come "one way" without an opportunity for "two way" communication. Individuals do not have an opportunity to interact, seek an explanation, or expand on the directions/information being received. Further, this "one way" communication generally comes from the "top" down to the rank and file. People need to be involved, and have a voice in matters that impact on them.

The personalities of the individuals who work or interact with each other may often be a source of conflict. There is a need to develop an understanding of, tolerance for, and ability to work with various personalities. The manner in which groups are structured should also accommodate, and take into account the personalities of the various members in order to effect more harmonious working relationships.

Unclear jurisdiction can cause conflict. An example of this is the cleaning of the blackboards. Conflict arises when neither the teacher nor the custodian accepts the cleaning of the blackboards as his/her responsibility. Clarifying areas of jurisdiction tends to eliminate conflict situations.

Conflict of interest, whether real or perceived, can cause concern on the part of staff. There is a need to clarify and avoid placing any staff member in a real or perceived conflict situation.

Individual staff members may have different objectives, make different assumptions, and/or have different values from other staff members. There is a need to recognize and deal with these areas in order to reach concensus and come to a common understanding that is acceptable to all and thus eliminate conflict.

Difference in methods used may also be a source of conflict. A new staff member may use far different techniques from a more experienced staff member. The more experienced staff member may reject/resent the method used by the newer member causing a conflict to exist between the two.

Staffs tire, resent, and object to the application of the same old solutions being used in dealing with problems that arise. They tire of the same old excuses and look to the administrator for a creative solution to a problem area.

Competition within a building can often lead to conflict when two or more individuals pursue the same goals.

When the causes and early symptoms of conflict are recognized, it is incumbent upon the administrator to recognize the type of conflict and take whatever action is most appropriate to eliminate or lessen the conflict situation.

Conflict is generally viewed as inevitable and negative. Conflict management refers to understanding and dealing with conflict in such a way that it serves a functional rather than a dysfunctional purpose. In dealing with conflict, administrators must keep in mind the types of conflict confronting them: individual conflict which is demonstrated in individual decision-making; interpersonal conflict which involves two or more individuals; organizational conflict which involves groups or individuals within the organization; and interorganizational conflict which involves outside groups.

Members of a staff and/or community can polarize around an issue and form groups in order to protect their common interests. "Intergroup conflict occurs when members of one group believe that their group's right to fulfill its needs or interests is denied by members of another group." (American Management Association, 1986).

There are basically five stages of conflict: potential conflict, which exists at all times; perceived conflict, which recognizes possible threats to one's value system; overt conflict which is open, verbal, and recognizable; and post-conflict, which is the condition and climate left to be dealt with after the conflict has been resolved or suppressed. It is important to recognize that the more a conflict escalates, the more difficult it will be to resolve it so that everyone can "save face".

These stages should be viewed as a continuum in which a repertoire of strategies should be developed to deal with various situations as the conflict escalates. Administrators need to recognize the readiness levels of the individuals they are working with in order to work effectively in a given situation by varying their leadership styles. Effective leaders use a range of leadership styles adjusting the style to the readiness level of the individuals they are working with. To use one leadership style is to deny the readiness level of the individuals and thereby serve as an additional source of conflict.

It has been said that conflict is inevitable in an educational organization and may well be a healthy signal that some areas need to be looked at, while the absence of conflict over a long period of time may well suggest a stagnant organization and/or program.

It is important to view conflict in neutral terms. Whether or not the conflict turns out "good" or "bad", "productive" or "destructive" depends largely on the ability of the administrator to manage the conflict. The surfacing of a conflict can elicit a negative administrative response that produces an unwholesome climate and becomes a destructive conflict that does damage to the organization.

When there is a positive administrative response to a conflict, a wholesome, productive climate generally exists. Effective administrators are those who, when faced with a conflict, make a positive response, maintain a wholesome climate, capitalize on the situation and move the organization forward.

In addressing and resolving conflicts, there are some universal rules for conflict management which administrators can use. The first one deals with avoiding either/or situations by identifying objectives, developing alternative solutions and striving for concensus. A similar, related rule is to avoid we/they confrontations by focusing on the problem, not the people involved; by avoiding the use of the personal pronoun; and by using situational descriptions. A third belief is to use facts and logic rather than attempting to control feelings with arguments, persuasion or threats. Another strategy is to limit the number of decision makers to those directly involved with the conflict and to develop a solution that has quality and acceptance in order to avoid further conflict.

Conflicts should be viewed as opportunities for growth. Avoid dealing with conflict or inaction that results in deadlocking the staff and/or community. There is a need to recognize that, when all is said and done, everyone must come out of it "whole"; a win-win sutation must exist. Victory for one group and defeat for the other will not do. Both sides' interests must be recognized and dealt with. Problem solving techniques such as brainstorming, concensus building, and compromise must be used. The group must be integrated into a working unit and the organization moved forward.

In working to produce a "productive conflict", there is a need to focus on goals, have open lines of communication, remain open-minded and use innovative methods in working with the groups. Resources need to be used to facilitate the resolution of the conflict. Above all, there is a need to have a mutually respectful, trusting relationship between all concerned. A commitment must be made by seeing to it that any conflict is resolved in the best interest of all, and particularly the students.

As school systems move to meet the challenges facing them, administrators and teachers recognize that they are laying the foundation for a lifetime of learning for generations to come. The time for concrete action is now in order to assure that the students are prepared to take their places in society despite the societal factors impacting them. Necessary changes must be made and conflicts that arise must be resolved in order to assure that the best possible climate exists in which teachers can teach and children can learn.

Believing that all children can learn, given the time to learn, and by planning so that learning can take place, it is possible for the students in school to succeed. And when they succeed, society succeeds.

> With the future of the nation resting upon the effectiveness of our efforts to attain unprecedented levels of scholastic excellence, a great responsibility is placed on the principals who lead and guide our nation's schools.
>
> Terrel H. Bell
> "A Nation Still at Risk"

Administrators, working with their staffs, recognize the challenges that lie ahead. They are preparing for the future, making the changes that need to be made and resolving conflicts as they occur. They are preparing their students for tomorrow -- today!